Making ‘Evidence’ the Plural of ‘Anecdote’

A ‘Work in Progress’ using Outcome Mapping and the Logframe in governance and accountability programming in Tanzania

OM ideas No. 6
November 2012

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‘We are increasingly confident that, through the way we are merging OM and conventional indicators in our revised log-frame, we are in a stronger position than before to provide a detailed and systematic body of qualitative and quantitative evidence that takes us beyond anecdotes, and towards a nuanced understanding of what makes change happen.’

OMideas is an Outcome Mapping Learning Community (OMLC) initiative to generate new knowlegde around the use and development of the OM methodology.

The papers in this series are authored by members of the OMLC, a global community of OM users dedicated to mutual learning and sharing of experiences around OM.

Background to AcT and Outcome Mapping’s place within the programme

With the AcT (Accountability in Tanzania) Programme, Outcome Mapping (OM) is being applied in the context of a £31m governance programme funded largely by the UK Department for International Development and managed by KPMG – originally with consortium partners ODI, MDF and Delta Partnership.

The programme is to run for 6 years (2009 to 2015) and includes ring-fenced finance (Including a contribution from DANIDA) for governance and accountability issues linked to environment and climate change.

The NGO sector in Tanzania is burgeoning in terms of numbers, but faces many challenges including a disconnect from broader civil society such as faith-based organisations and trade unions, and lack of conceptual clarity on the part of many NGOs about the relationship between citizen action and civil society. The sector is highly donor dependant, both financially and often intellectually – with the result that many NGOs chase resources at the expense of fresh thinking about citizens’ needs and priorities and how they can be addressed.

Figure 1 captures the scope of what AcT set out to do in 2009/10 when the programme was first getting off the ground.

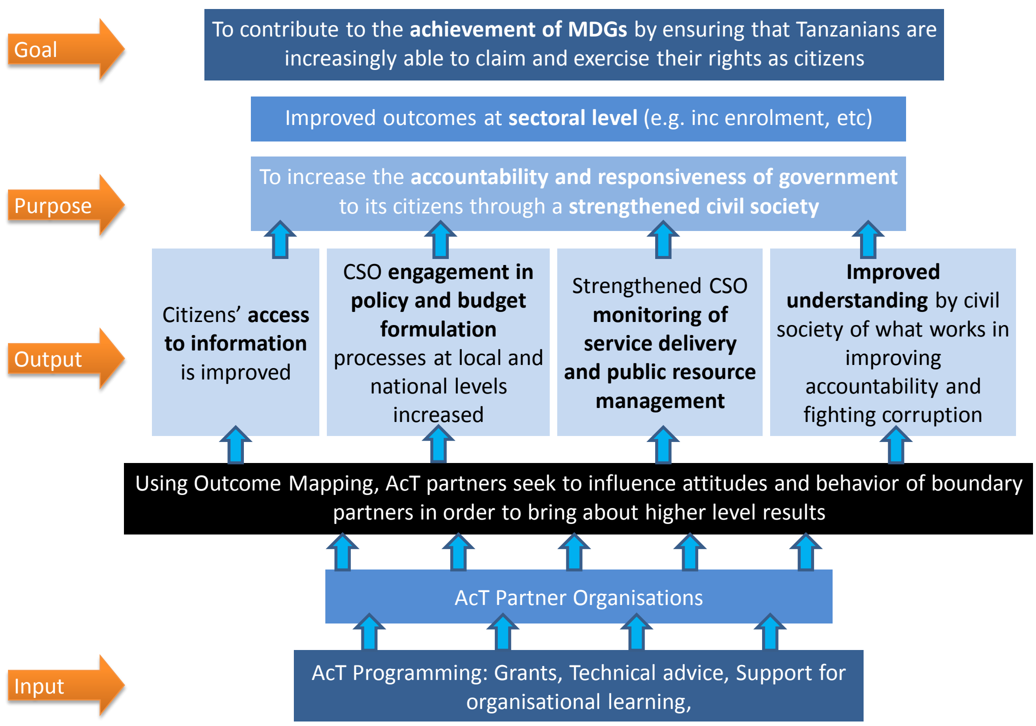

Fig 1: Logic Model Showing AcT’s Original Results Chains

The arrows on the left shows the information in the original log-frame, which until recently was the basis of KPMG's reporting to DFID. As shown by the black box, Outcome Mapping (OM) was conceived as being a process of focusing on attitude and behaviour change on the part of all stakeholders that would facilitate the achievement of the higher level results [1]. Grants are made to a portfolio of grantees, which we call our partner organizations [2] and they are the ones that actually achieve the results which it is hoped will contribute to improved accountability of government.

The programme fulfils all the classic criteria for when using OM is ideal: working in a complex, multi-stakeholder environment where results are unlikely to be achieved in a linear fashion. The original thinking was that using the RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach [3] partner organisations would be supported to strengthen their own strategic thinking as well as monitoring and learning systems to bring about change in the relationships between elected representatives, appointed officials and citizens.

Over time our thinking developed beyond the 'black box' to seeing that changes in attitude and behaviour on the part of all stakeholders will underpin the achievement of results from basic outputs to purpose and goal, and actually demonstrate how change happens.

The challenge for us has been how to demonstrate and report this in a credible and consistent fashion within the constraints of a log-frame; conventional indicators are good for clear, major steps, like in national poverty monitoring systems, but don't provide enough nuance about changes in attitude of individual stakeholders, or the smaller initial steps (such as meaningful engagement with civil society, provision of information) that it is believed will contribute to the achievement of the higher level results (water points functioning, higher enrolment levels etc).

Rethinking our logic

After a couple of years of operation of the AcT Programme, it became clear to us that elements of our programme needed re-thinking and re-design, an element of which was to better emphasize and organize the capture of data related to changes in behaviour of key stakeholders. Figure 2 provides a quick summary of the emergent process.

Our purpose statement had two levels in the same statement: 'increased government responsiveness and accountability through a strengthened civil society'; this

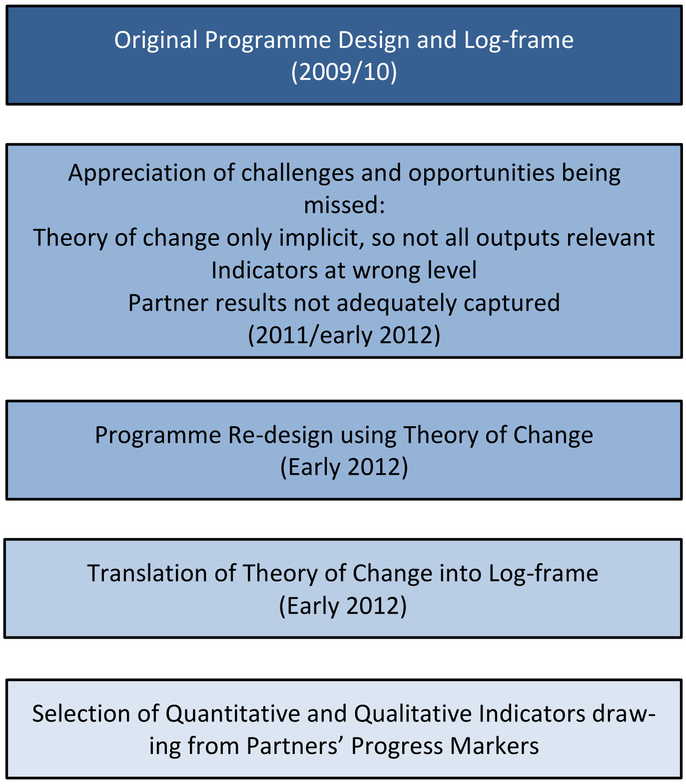

Fig 2: Steps in the AcT Programme's Emergent Design

was a problem immediately spotted by log-frame enthusiasts. We were struggling with the point that we seemed to be a demand side governance programme aiming for a supply side result from government, something that clearly was not under our control. Underlying these points was the issue that our Theory of Change was implicit (that strengthening civil society would lead to government responsiveness and accountability) but not explicit and didn't feed well into our choice of indicators. Colleagues in DFID advised that articulating a theory of change (ToC) might help us clarify what results we were aiming to achieve, and hence what kinds of indicators, qualitative and / or quantitative, would be appropriate.

The conventional indicators [4] linked to our original log-frame were problematic, mainly because they did not capture adequately the range and depth of results partners were achieving. Partly, they were not well chosen even as conventional indicators, and partly they were selected before we were systematically getting OM outcome journals from our partners, which showed us the possibility of collating results in a different way [5]. By including the evidence partners presented that a progress marker was being achieved, we would be able to capture both small initial steps towards change, as well as transformative change itself.

Box 1: AcT programme Theory of Change

If civil society grantees are carefully selected and respond to individual support tailored to their programming and internal systems, they will be able to develop targeted strategic interventions which are sensitive to changes over time and in the broader political economy, as well as their geographic location, their sector, institutional mandate and values.

And if grantees also commit also commit to systematic learning individually and collectively the work they do will be more the effective.

CSOs implementing programmes will engage in a range of information generating and disseminating activities as well as developing the capacity of other stakeholders to articulate their roles and responsibilities.

Some participatory activities build directly into citizen action and civil society strengthening, whereas others focus on influencing the behaviour of elected and appointed officials and of the judiciary – at local and national levels.

Influencing activities can be formal or informal, inside track or outside track, and CSOs become more adept at selecting which is going to be most effective under what circumstances.

The result of the behaviour changes on the part of key stakeholders is the purpose level of the programme: 'Increased responsiveness and accountability of government through a strengthened civil society'.

We set to work and developed a short ToC: *'Supporting civil society partners to implement context-specific strategic interventions will enable them to influence positive change in the attitudes and behaviour of citizens, civil society and government, making government as a whole more responsive and accountable.'* It was only when this was articulated into a fuller narrative [6], were we able to gain clarity about what we were really doing and the assumptions underlying our work (see Box 1; the underlined text are pieces drawn from the logic model, which shows how key elements of the ToC translated into the different parts of the logic model, at different and relevant levels).

The next step was to make the transition into a log-frame, which we did via logic model in Figure 3. From the logic model, it was a relatively short step into the log-frame, which is summarized in Figure 4.

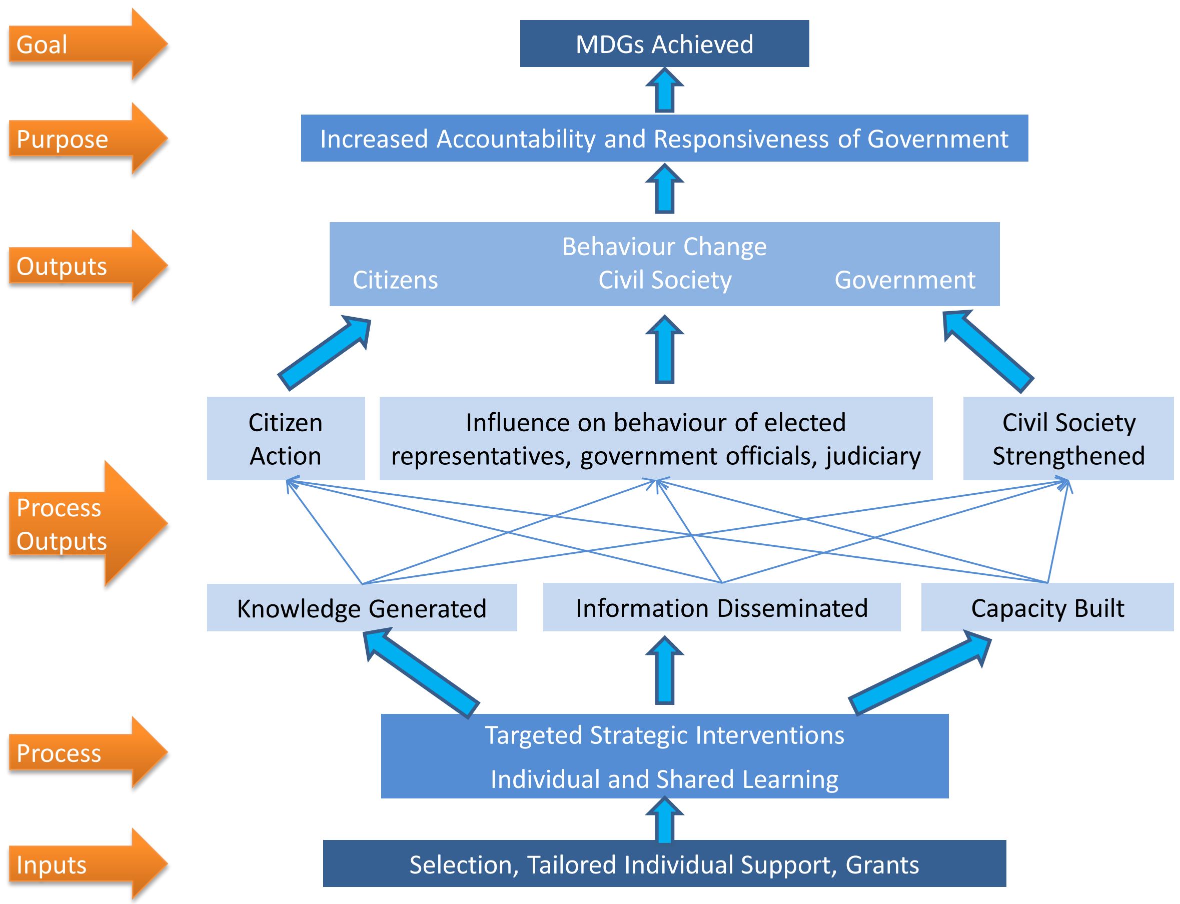

Fig 3: Logic Model based on the AcT Programme's revised Theory of Change

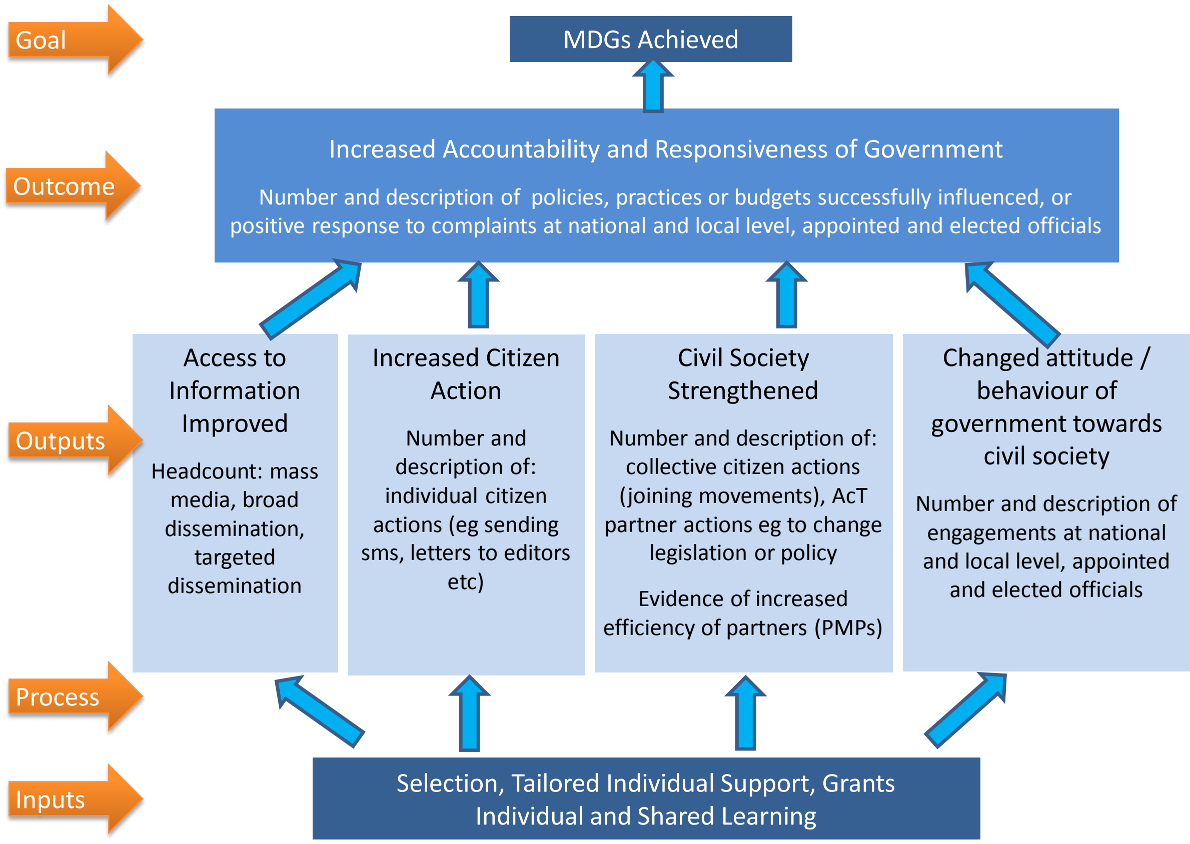

Fig 4: Log-frame based on the AcT Programme's revised Logic Model

Collecting and making sense of multi-level indicators

The next 'Ah ha' moment came in developing, collecting and aggregating indicators for the different levels. It became apparent that much of the data needed could come from the results partners were already collecting through their outcome journals. Not all our partners use Outcome Mapping, but interestingly, even those who do not, often have results that can translate directly into these indicators. For example, the narrative reports that we receive from partners every six months, will contain mini case studies, success stories as well as most significant change stories. Partners observe changes, sense that they matter, and report them back as anecdotes in the context of longer narrative reports, but there's often a lack of certainty as to their value, as they can be seen as 'one off', with uncertain representativeness or replicability, nor do they fit into their conventional indicators. However, once they are collated alongside results from other partners, it can become clearer whether or not they are part of a pattern of governance and accountability changes, or are outliers. And so the conventional indicators become 'containers' which can hold quantitative and qualitative information from any monitoring, including OM monitoring.
As the AcT Portfolio filled up, it had become clear to us that many of our partner organisations, unsurprisingly, had similar boundary partners, including:

- elected representatives at national level (MPs) and at local level (councillors),
- officials/civil servants at national and local level
- citizens and communities, NGO/CBO partners
- the media

For those that do use outcome journals, very often their outcome challenge statements (although we found it easier to call them 'vision statements') talk about changes in policy and practice – the main differences being by sector or by part of the country. This means that the results that are being reported to us through outcome journals kept by our partners, were a very rich and diverse source of information about changes in governance.

For ease of our data management, we are translating the results reported by partners onto a database. Not all the work that a partner is generates is necessarily of direct relevant to the AcT results framework, so we select from their narrative report or the outcome journals they have provided us with, the evidence that is of most relevance to us. For example, one partner focuses on governance in the forestry sector, and one of their selected boundary partners is private sector wood buyers. In terms of *their* work monitoring the behaviour of the private sector is critical, in terms of the AcT Programme it is less so. Without denying the importance of the private sector, our focus is rather on elected representatives and civil servants at both national and local levels, so we don't enter the material on the wood buyers into our database – we focus rather on the elected representatives and civil servants because these are common to almost all partners, and because the attitude and behaviour of these stakeholders gets to the heart of the relationship between citizens and the state.

Box 2: Tracking progressive change

In collating evidence reported in our partners' outcome journals. It is possible to see an individual partners work through the different levels of Figure 4 above. For example, it might start with information dissemination to raise awareness or provide detailed and specific information on an issue (output 1), to stimulate citizens or partners of partner organisations to take action (output 2 or 3), which often involves trying to get elected officials or civil servants to engage seriously in the matter (output 4). These results then support the results we are seeking at purpose level: actual changes in policy, practice, legislation, budget or response to complaints by elected representatives or civil servants at local or national level.

In practical terms, when a report or outcome journal comes in from a partner, we code it to show which of our output or purpose indicators it relates to. This evidence is entered into the database alongside the relevant code. When it comes to reporting to DFID, it is then relatively easy to provide reports which show the number (quantitative indicator) and description (qualitative indicator) of the changes that partners are collectively reporting.

Collecting results in this way enables us to move well beyond one-off anecdotes and to see the scope and scale of what partners are doing. Some of the interesting pictures and questions that have emerged include the following examples:

- There is far more work going on at local level than national level. This belies the stereotype that civil society in Tanzania is Dar es Salaam focused. Most of the attention seems to be at local government levels.
- Despite the assumption that advocacy organisations spend their time in national level working groups and sector reviews trying to influence policy and legislation, most of their time and resources are actually spent out in the field doing awareness raising, capacity building and research.
- The numbers reached through information dissemination are remarkably high, not least because at the moment we are using a head-count of those reached, although we are trying to avoid double counting. This raises questions of whether there is a useful reinforcement of governance messages going on or whether a kind of saturation point has been reached. Now we have a figure and description of the kinds of citizen actions taking place, we could try to track back to understand the kinds of information dissemination that stimulate action. If outcome journals or other partner reporting systems could be used more rigorously we might be able to surface fascinating information about what encourages citizens to move beyond fear and into taking action. We might even be able to reach the 'holy grail' (for some people!) of governance work: working out what kinds of strategies should be funded [7].
- Patterns surfaced when we merged evidence of citizen action from progress markers and conventional indicators. For example, misuse of funds at local level when there was collusion between elected and appointed officials instead of holding each other to account. Again, when a local official was found to be in the wrong, misused funds were frequently returned, but then the officer concerned transferred away from the locality, with those who brought the issue to light suspicious that proper disciplinary action was not actually taken. A single partner organisation may not have enough results of this sort for a picture to emerge, but when collectively they add up to a clear pattern, it needs to be the stimulus to reflection on what the strategic response by CSOs can most usefully be.
- Sometimes it is possible to track forward into the number of beneficiaries from changed actions. When long non-functioning water points are finally rehabilitated because a budget is allocated to the work, or when a group of disabled people are given transport allowances to enabled them to access specialist medical treatment [8], this is fairly easy. When a council refuses to approve a budget because it was only given to them at 12 hours' notice, it is less easy, but nevertheless, possibly a very telling result in terms of governance and accountability.

All these observations, and more, are currently the subject of reflection by the AcT Programme and its partners, individually and collectively, which is this reporting is still a work in progress. It feeds back into our Theory of Change that if CSOs engage in systematic learning they will be more effective, and that CSOs need to be adept at selecting different kinds of actions to respond to different circumstances as they emerge. Conversely it behoves donors to design their programmes and their funding to so that flexibility is encouraged.

What can we learn from adapting Outcome Mapping?

OM is not for the faint-hearted. It takes a lot of investment of time and energy to get the full value out of it. Expertise in Tanzania in OM, when we started, was scarce, and we have had to spend a lot of time teaching and learning ourselves, and trying to facilitate that process for others. A one size fits all model does not work; but a good understanding of the methodology is important in order to help partner organisations see the way forward given their different sectors, approaches, organizational histories, values and so on. We are still learning and so are our partner organizations.

When AcT was first set up it was assumed that training in OM could be a one off intervention, and hence that a lot of the training and support could reasonably be outsourced. Because of the need to learn ourselves and because an 'accompaniment' model seems to work better in terms of supporting partners, we have abandoned the outsourcing, and have an 'in-house' team. So far that is working well, but responding to the level of demand from partners, so that they don't feel unable to adequately follow through on the initial support to get them started, remains a challenge.

A related challenge, that we have not yet responded to, is that our grantees often have their own partners who would really benefit from training and support, and unfortunately we are definitely not resourced to provide that. Whilst it's important that people feel able to adapt OM, it is also important that key elements remain central to the process.

At the outset of the process, the scope and scale of how we would use OM was not clearly defined. We thought we had made something of a break through when we saw it as a 'black box' in the middle of our logic model. Thinking has emerged over time and so has the design of the programme. It has been fundamental to achievements so far that DFID's approach has been supportive and flexible – willing to contribute, but also to step back and let the KPMG based team get on with the work. That really deserves appreciation. Being a 'back donor' is not as easy as it seems!

DFID's re-asserted focus on value for money (VfM) is to be welcomed for the focus it provides to both KPMG and to AcT grantees about the opportunity cost of spending money on any particular strategy. However, one of the things the strongest and most effective of the AcT partners said they valued in the early days of our partnership, was that a shared OM approach focused attention on changing behaviour and relationships. This has to remain fundamental to governance programming, based as it is on changing the relationships between citizens, civil society and the state. It is important that thinking about VfM does not degenerate into a numbers game, which is likely to push partners thinking back down to input/output reporting at the expense of higher level results.

On the other hand, we are increasingly confident that, through the way we are merging OM and conventional indicators in our revised log-frame, we are in a stronger position than before to provide a detailed and systematic body of qualitative and quantitative evidence that takes us beyond anecdotes, and towards a nuanced understanding of what makes change happen. It's an on-going process and the ideas sketched here owe much to the contribution of many different people, and we look forward to a continued dialogue about how to take it further.

Further reading

www.accountability.or.tz Here you will find various items of possible interest: An ODI Study, conducted by Simon Hearn and others about OM and its value to AcT Grantees; the training manual we have been using, some early thinking about log-frames and OM, our learning strategy, as well as details about all our grantees.

Notes

[1] For example, access to information is a major issue for organisations seeking to do budget tracking or monitor service delivery. Despite official endorsement of making information available through public noticeboards, in practice it rarely is, and many civil servants refuse to make information available on the grounds that it needs to be kept confidential. Similarly, government officials (whether elected or appointed) really seeing themselves as needing to be responsive to citizens is a major change in attitude.

[2] Current grantees are: ActionAid Tanzania, CafeAfrica Tanzania, Caucus for Children's Rights, Equality for Growth, Daraja, HakiElimu, HakiKazi Catalyst, HelpAge Tanzania, KWIECO, Legal and Human Rights Centre, Oxfam Tanzania, Norwegian Church Aid, REPOA, SNV, Tandabui Health Access Tanzania, Tanzania Natural Resources Forum, Tanzania Forest Conservation Group, Women's Dignity. This represents a good spread of international and local NGOs, whose work covers a focus on economic growth, human/social development, as well as a direct focus on human rights and the rule of law.

[3] The RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach is an adaptation of OM developed by the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme at ODI, for particular use in situations involving policy influencing. www.odi.org.uk/opinion/docs/7173.pdf

[4] For example, use of World Bank Governance Indicators at purpose level.

[5] It was a first, subsequently abandoned, attempt at collating results in a different way that we presented at the Beirut workshop.

[6] Sincere thanks to Paul Thornton's inputs at this point. www.verulamassociates.com

[7] Though probably, and at the risk of mixing metaphors, it is more likely to be similar to finding 'the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow' since as soon as you get there, critical contextual factors will have changed, and hence so too must the course of action.

[8] Both reported by partners during 2011/12.

About the author

Kate Dyer is an experienced strategic planning facilitator with a particular interest in governance and accountability. She is currently Programme Director of the Accountability in Tanzania Programme.

This short case study reports on our work in progress in terms of adapting the OM approach. Sincere appreciation is owed to the participants at the OM Lab in Beirut in February 2012 for their feedback on our presentation. It helped stimulate our thinking further, and contributed to a significant revision of our log-frame undertaken in March/April 2012. This has resulted in a more systematic way of results reporting using a log-frame, but which captures much of the richness of the OM results reporting from AcT partners. It takes us much closer to getting beyond anecdote and into a systematic body of evidence.

Edited by Kaia Ambrose, design and layout by Simon Hearn.

This report is part of series published by the Outcome Mapping Learning Community, an open network, governed by a group of voluntary 'stewards', managed by ODI and supported financially by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).